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NEW BOOKS REVIEWED

THE CHURCH. By John Huss. Translated, with notes and an introduction, by David S. Schaff. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915.

Through his scholarly translation of the Treatise upon the Church written in 1413 by John Huss, the Bohemian reformer and martyr, Dr. Schaff has placed a work of the first importance in the history of religious belief—and hence in the history of thought and of civilization—within the reach of readers who have hitherto known it chiefly by its renown. Huss's treatise is, as Dr. Schaff remarks, "the best known work upon the subject issued from Augustine to the Reformation period." Huss himself was a true precursor of Luther, though a determining influence over the latter cannot be claimed for him. Historically speaking, his trial, upon charges drawn from this *magnum opus* and *apologia pro vita sua* of his, is "the most famous formal trial of a single individual in the history of the Christian Church," not forgetting those of Abelard and Savonarola. So far, at least, as the written word is concerned, the influence of Huss has been greater than that of his predecessor and acknowledged master, Wyclif; for Wyclif's Treatise upon the Church was hidden away in manuscript until a generation ago, and the power over men's minds which his views continued to exercise long after his death was due rather to tradition and to his version of the Bible than to any original writing of his; while the effect upon the development of the idea of the Church produced by the treatise of Huss has been permanent and plainly marked. In a sense, Huss suffered martyrdom in Wyclif's stead, and through his death and his treatise, he kept open a subject of the utmost consequence to mankind.

Born in 1373, Huss was a student at the University of Prague during the period of its greatest influence and celebrity. In 1403 he was made rector of the University, holding the position for six months, and he was again rector in 1409 for the term of a year. Appointed, in 1403, preacher of Bethlehem Chapel, which had been founded ten years earlier to afford preaching in the native Czech tongue, Huss at once commanded attention by the fervency of his eloquence and the fearlessness of his attacks upon the abuses of the clergy. He made the Chapel the center of a new religious force and of a national movement

as well. His first conflict with the authorities came through his refusal to acquiesce in a ruling of the University making it an offense to teach or read the writings of Wyclif, which had been carried to Bohemia soon after the Englishman's death in 1384 and had made as deep an impression there as in the land of their origin. At the instance of the clergy hostile to Huss, an appeal was made to Rome, the archbishop of Prague was instructed by the Pope to take measures against the Wyclifite heresy; chapels such as Huss preached in were ordered closed; and in 1410 the archbishop made a bonfire of Wyclif's writings in the dooryard of his palace. Huss, moreover, raised up for himself bitter and powerful enemies through the leading part he took in bringing about a change in the charter of the University—a change by which the native Czech element was given three votes, while the foreign nations were reduced from three to one. A third cause of trouble for the reformer was his attack in 1412 upon the sale of indulgences authorized by John XXIII to enable him to carry on a crusade against Ladislaus, King of Naples. Huss spoke out as boldly as did Luther a hundred years later. Deserted by most of his friends, he voiced his own firm belief against a practically universal conviction and an all-powerful church, with a degree of moral courage for which in these days it would be difficult to find a parallel. To read without adequate historical sense or background the *Treatise on the Church*, with its passages of somewhat thorny dialectic, might well prove an unrewarding task; but to read it in a proper light and spirit—as Dr. Schaff (so far as the limited space of his introduction permits) enables one to do—is to realize afresh the preciousness of that union of intellect with conscience which makes character—and history. Huss's unyielding resistance to the papal power led to the almost inevitable consequences. He was excommunicated, and, this proving insufficient, the city of Prague was put under the interdict. In 1414, Huss went to undergo trial before the œcumenical council at Constance, and on July 6, 1415, the council, after charging him with thirty errors, handed him over to the civil authorities to be burned as a heretic.

Huss sought primarily to base his argument firmly upon the Scriptures, and secondarily to reconcile it with the canon law. This latter task, especially, required a full use of that logic, at once ingenious and childish—as it seems to a scientifically trained and free-thinking modern—which comes into play when truths having their real basis in conscience and common sense have to be proved by words and texts. There are difficult scholastic passages in Huss's treatise—passages curiously contrasting with others in which the author speaks as humanly and forthrightly as one of Wyclif's "poor priests." Even in the more recondite parts of his treatise one may pay tribute to the passionate earnestness of the man, recognizing him as no mere logician, but rather as a laborer in the cause of clearness of thought, obliged to cut his way as best he could through preconceptions, precedents, verbal difficulties. Great as his debt to Wyclif admittedly is, he is

plainly no servile imitator, for his discourse differs from that of his predecessor in just those matters of detail, of figure, of illustration and citation, in which one would expect a vain and feeble borrower to show least originality.

Huss begins his treatise with a subtle and carefully guarded definition of the church—a definition meant to be scripturally sound and metaphysically clear. This definition sets at naught the ideas prevailing at the time—that the Pope and the Cardinals constitute the church; or that the church is confined to those over whom the apostolic see has jurisdiction. “The Roman Church,” said Huss, “is not the Catholic Apostolic Church, for no partial church can be the Holy Catholic Church. However, among the militant churches the Roman Church is the principal one.” The Roman pontiff, he next contended, is not the head of the church on earth. Christ is the head. And the rock upon which the church is built is Christ and not Peter. Moreover, Huss sought to show that the power of the Keys, or of remitting sins and retaining them, was in reality conferred not upon Peter alone but through him upon the church; and further that this power is merely declaratory—that neither Pope nor priest can absolve from sin except where God has before absolved. The scriptures, Huss held, supply the supreme rule of life and conduct. Finally, one hundred years before Luther’s famous protest against the burning of heretics, Huss, appealing to the example of Christ and the purpose of the Gospel, denied the right of the Church to kill or torture misbelievers.

The copious notes, and the exact references to the works quoted or used by Huss which Dr. Schaff has provided, are adequate and reliable helps to the student of church history. The editor’s interest in his task is, however, not merely that of the narrow specialist; he leads his readers to see the significance of Huss’s work in the largest view. “When the two principles emphasized in this treatise,” he writes, “are given proper recognition—personal devotion to Christ and a daily life conformed to his teachings and example—the practise of Christian tolerance and all human tolerance will be advanced. This treatise will have a mission to-day, if its pages promote the idea that devotion to Christ is the condition and surety of Christian fellowship.”

AMERICA AND HER PROBLEMS. By Paul H. B. D’Estournelles de Constant. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1915.

No book about the United States by a foreign observer is more suave in manner, more acceptably cordial in spirit, than this of Baron D’Estournelles de Constant. The author writes from a point of view determined by a lifetime of observation, study, and travel in distant lands. His journeyings in this country extended from the Atlantic to the Pacific and from Mexico to Canada; they gave opportunity for